DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 791 JC 960 418

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TITLE Creating Our Future Together: A Summary Report from the Future Search Conference Series for Austin Community College.
INSTITUTION Austin Community Coll., Tex.
PUB DATE Jun 95
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Planning; Community Colleges; *Conferences; Educational Cooperation; *Institutional Mission; Multicampus Colleges; *Organizational Objectives; *Participative Decision Making; School Community Relationship; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Austin Community College TX

ABSTRACT

In Spring 1995, Austin Community College (ACC), in Texas conducted a series of six conferences in its effort to shift towards shared governance and a learning organization model of operation. The conferences were designed to develop a shared vision for the future, with each conference being held at a different campus or site and engaging nearly 400 stakeholders from all levels of the institution and from the community. The most challenging tasks in planning the conferences were recognizing the need for diverse perspectives and integrating the knowledge from the final conference into a comprehensive vision of the future of the college. The model used to develop the conferences emphasized the participation of the whole system, the historical and global contexts of ACC, small group self-management and dialogue, discovering common ground and shared visions, and process-oriented analysis. Specifically, the conference series sought to accomplish the following five major tasks: identifying significant events in the organization's past, recognizing present trends that will affect the organization, creating an ideal future, confirming the shared vision, and developing action strategies for the future. The conferences resulted in the development of a common vision and values statement; identification of potential projects, unresolved issues, and unique campus issues; and the establishment of seven task forces. Includes detailed summaries of individual conferences and a discussion of nine lessons learned in developing the conference series. (TGI)

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ED 396 791

Creating Our Future Together

A Summary Report from the Future Search Conference Series for Austin Community College

February–May, 1995

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Context

In the Spring semester of 1995, as part of an extensive shift toward shared governance and a learning organization model of operation, Austin Community College held a series of six Future Search Conferences to outline its shared vision and values for the future.

The Future Search Conference method selected was one developed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, organizational consultants in Philadelphia, PA, and directors of SearchNet, a non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating community and institutional growth and development. The model is described in the third section of this report.

In discussing the options which were available to us, it became evident rather quickly that holding a single Future Search Conference would limit the number of participants who could take part in the process to less than 70. At the suggestion of our Institutional Effectiveness Committee, we decided to hold a series of conferences, one for each major campus or site, as well as a final "Capstone" conference which would focus on the institution as a whole and integrate the visions of the earlier conferences.

While significantly increasing the complexity of the task, this approach enabled us to accomplish several goals which were of importance to our institution:

> **First of all,** since we are a multi-campus community college district with more than 30,000 students in our credit and non-credit courses, the issue of centralization/decentralization has been a continuing theme which we have had to confront. Holding individual campus conferences allowed us to honor and value the unique history, contributions, and community each campus represented, and permited them to plan for an ideal future that would adequately reflect their own challenges, opportunities, and goals.

Secondly, by expanding the number of conferences to six, we could directly engage the energy, experience, and insight of almost 400 concerned "stakeholders" from all levels of the institution and from the larger community as well. The resulting networks of relationships, ideas, and projects were far more complex and extensive as a result. When the indirect impact of the six conferences on the colleagues, co-workers, and constituencies of the participants is considered, the proportion of the institution affected by the process has been considerable.

Thirdly, holding the Capstone Conference at the conclusion of the campus conferences made it possible to incorporate the collective insights and intentions of the various campuses and to integrate them into the overall vision for the institution. With this sequence of events, the emphasis was clearly on developing our vision from "the ground up" rather than "the top down." And, with its more comprehensive focus, the Capstone Conference served as an extension of–as well as validation for–the results from the campus conferences.

Finally, the Future Search Conference model itself, with its emphasis on interaction, engagement, and empowerment, was very concrete and direct evidence that individuals *and* organizations can learn from experience and discover common ground on which to move forward. By identifying and confirming those themes and visions which had system-wide support, the potential for a positive future was demonstrated rather than debated and the initiation of collaborative action could begin immediately.

As you will see in the remainder of this report, the outcomes of the Future Search Conference Series demonstrate substantial achievement of each of these initial goals.

Process

Once the decision to proceed was made by the President's Cabinet, steering committees were identified for each of the five campus conferences. These committees, with the Campus Vice-Presidents as chairs, were responsible for organizing the conferences, selecting and inviting the participants, and insuring that the results were collected and reported out to the larger community. The committees were assisted in that task by the Coordinators of Professional and Organizational Development, Dee Fentiman and Tobin Quereau, who had been trained in the Future Search Conference model by its developers, Weisbord and Janoff.

Beginning in December of 1994, each of the five campus steering committees met weekly to identify their central task or theme for their conference, set dates, designate a location, and, most importantly, begin the selection of participants for their conference. Of all the factors which contributed to the success of the conferences, the single most important one we could identify was getting "the right people" into the room.

The Future Search Conference process has been developed and refined over some twenty years and provides an excellent foundation for the interaction and facilitation of participants in search of their preferred future. The success of the experience, however, is dependent on having the entire "system" represented in the room in "real time" so that maximum creativity, collaboration, and consensus can be generated.

The most challenging tasks in the preparation stage for the conferences were to discover the many levels and dimensions of each "system" we were serving; to select key individuals who could represent the perspectives of these different constituencies; and then *to make sure that they would come.* That last task required the full participation of the steering committees and typically continued up until the day of the conference itself!

Once the participants were "in the room" and engaged in the process, the largest share of the "work" was done. What remained was the rewarding experience of a diverse community discovering its common ground and describing its ideal future vision.

A unique aspect to this "series" model of future search conferences was the final Capstone Conference. The purpose of this conference was different from, though related to, that of the campus conferences. The plan was to have the Capstone Conference reflect on the information and insights of all of the previous conferences and to integrate that knowledge into a comprehensive vision of what we wanted the college to become twenty years in the future.

A complicating, but essential, factor was that most of the participants in the Capstone Conference would be new to the process and unfamiliar with the model or the conference outcomes prior to their participation. We made a choice not to limit the participation in the final conference to those who had already been involved at a campus level. Our reasoning was that we wanted to maximize the number and breadth of people we could involve in the series; that the focus for the final conference would be different from the earlier campus-focused conferences and would, thus, call for a different mix of participants; and that we wanted this final conference to serve as a "validating" experience which would not be simply a reflection of what went before, but a confirmation of it at a new level of focus and intention.

This unusual structure called for a modified version of the process we had been using during the first five conferences, and, for that, the guidance of the originators, Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, was invaluable. They facilitated the Capstone Conference for us and were able to create viable modifications which allowed us not only to access the energy and insight of those who were present in the room, but also to draw on the outcomes of the earlier conferences as well when we created our vision for the college as a whole. The resulting convergence of visions from the campus conferences and the Capstone Conference was quite remarkable, reinforcing the validity of the conference series model.

Model

A Future Search Conference, as designed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff, is a structured, three-day, 16-hour experience designed to involve up to 64 internal and external "stakeholders" of an organization. The goal is to search for the common ground and shared vision of a long-term future that *all* participants can support.

The distinctive characteristics of a Future Search Conference are as follows:

1. The **"whole system"** participates in the process. Including representatives from as many different levels and perspectives as possible insures a diverse range of viewpoints and insights and contributes to the viability of the outcome in relation to the whole organization.

2. The future scenarios are generated within **historical** and **global contexts.** In addition to creating a more accurate representation of the organization, these perspectives add to the depth of the analysis and the breadth of the intentions that are generated in the process.

3. People **self-manage** their small group work and are encouraged to use **dialogue** in their interactions throughout the conference. This insures that each person can be heard, that responsibility of action remains with the individual, and that collaboration and accountability is valued within the organization.

4. The focus of the work is on discovering **common ground** and **shared visions** rather than resolving and problem-solving differences. The natural variations of perception, opinion, and intention are honored and incorporated into the final outcome, encouraging a more complex perspective to emerge and a stronger consensus for action to be created.

5. The Future Search model is **process-oriented** instead of content-based. The framework of the five major tasks is content-neutral, allowing the focus to remain on the unique context and task of the people and organization involved rather than on "expert" opinion or "outside analysis." The result of this approach is increased commitment to the outcomes and the feeling among participants that "we did it ourselves!"

The five major tasks of a Future Search Conference are as follows:

1. **Focus on the Past**–In this activity, participants look back over the past ten to twenty years and identify significant marker events at the personal, organizational, and global levels. Then, as a group, they record their findings on 24-foot timelines mounted on the wall and, in small mixed groups, analyze and report on the themes and meanings they discover in the data they have generated.

2. **Focus on the Present:**

   Externally–The second task is to place the organization in the context of the present world to which it must respond. This is done by brainstorming a massive "mind map" of all key trends having (or potentially having) an impact on the organization and assessing how the organization is responding to them.

   Internally–In this activity the stakeholder groups meet to list their "proudest prouds" and "sorriest sorries" and accept ownership of and accountability for the actions (and non-actions!) that are identified.

3. **Focus on the Future: Ideal Future Scenarios**–At this point the small groups turn their attention to the preferred future they seek, creating dramatic depictions of the accomplishments they anticipate and the barriers they expect to overcome to get there over the next twenty years.

4. **Confirming our Common Futures**–Following the presentation of the small group scenarios, the whole group gathers to identify and confirm the shared vision which all participants can support.

5. **Action Planning**–The final step in the conference model is to return to the stakeholder groups to begin planning action strategies and steps which will bring about the future results that the group has delineated.

Following the conference, a summary report is created which can serve as a record of the experience and a means of sharing it with those who were not able to participate. It is also helpful to implement an interactive process for disseminating the outcomes to and enlisting the support of others in the organization and community.

Outcomes

Included in this section of the report are statistical data and samples of the summaries from the conferences which have been widely distributed to the college community. The more comprehensive reports range from 18 to 25 pages long, and include most of the information generated in the course of a two or three-day conference. These more detailed reports serve not only as monitoring documents for subsequent activities, but also as rich sources of continued learning and innovative ideas for the future.

Conference Series Overview:

Host	Theme	Date	Size
1. Pinnacle Campus	**Choosing Our Future: A Quest for Educational Excellence**	Feb. 24-25, 1995	58
2. Riverside Campus	**Creating a Shared Vision**	Mar. 3-4, 1995	54
3. Northridge/ Cypress Creek Campuses	**Creating a Quality Community**	Mar. 30-Apr. 1	56
4. Rio Grande/ Eastridge Campuses	**Future Search: Renewing, Growing, Changing**	Apr. 7-8, 1995	41
5. District Offices	**FutureLink**	Apr. 21-22, 1995	46
6. Capstone Conference	**ACC: An Inclusive Community**	May 4-6. 1995	59

Pinnacle Campus
Future Search Conference Summary
"Choosing Our Future: A Quest for Educational Excellence"
February 24-25, 1995

A Shared Vision for the Pinnacle

Participants envisioned a future in which the ACC Pinnacle Campus will:

- BE responsive to the needs of students by providing many options, including traditional classroom spaces, electronic classrooms. The Pinnacle will be the multi-modal delivery node for a variety of learning experiences.
- SERVE as community INTERNET. the link-pin for an array of community educational services.
- BE accountable for its performance as a deliverer of relevant educational experiences of the highest quality.
- CREATE a network of resources and services to meet the lifelong educational and training needs of a diverse population.
- PROVIDE life- long education for the community.
- PREPARE students to function as good citizens in a global community.
- BE market driven, an institution which recognizes and responds to the needs of the community and potential students.
- PROVIDE a variety of educational options, including the virtual classroom.
- ACT as a Hub or Broker of services to deliver quality educational experiences to students:
  –when they need it
  –where they need it
  –how they need it
  –what they need !!

Shared Values: Principles to Live By

The values which the Future Search participants believe to worthy of a commitment are:

- Access and afford-ability for all
- Collaboration
- Self-direction and personal freedom
- Community service

- Respect for diversity
- Responsiveness to community needs
- Partnerships with business, government, community.
- Opportunities for learning for all faculty
- Maintenance of high standards
- High expectations
- Equality
- Accountability
- Responsibility
- Trust
- Integrity
- Creativity
- Caring

Dreams for the Future: Accomplishments

A summary of the things participants envisioned as significant future accomplishments include the following:

- Building a new SW-Austin campus, a student friendly learning environment.
- Beginning creative marketing of our educational and community services.
- Providing variety and flexibility in our curriculum.
- Creating of a distance learning business.
- Becoming a four year college.
- Offering a variety of intramural sports for both women and men.
- Offering childcare and other services so that everyone has access to education.
- Developing alternative funding sources.
- Learning how to efficiently allocate resources.
- Creating a responsive, decentralized structure.
- Developing and providing competency-based education programs instead of degree-based programs.
- Collaborating and sharing resources with other organizations.
- Developing partnerships with businesses.
- Providing our students a variety of instructional methods.
- Integrating social concerns and how to solve personal problems into all learning modules.
- Utilizing technology to increase opportunity for learning.
- Involving the community in fund-raising activities.
- Making education accessible by developing a secure scholarship fund.
- Developing partnerships with businesses and the community.
- Impacting the development of an infrastructure to ensure access to the community.

Riverside Campus
Future Search Conference Summary
"Creating a Shared Vision"
March 3-4, 1995

A. SHARED VALUES

- Educational needs of students are the highest priority. Programs and services will focus on increasing student access, student success, and maximizing human potential.
- Sensitivity to individual, community, and industry needs
- Sensitivity to the cultural diversity of our community. Programs and services will support cultural pluralism. Campus will attract and maintain a diversified staff and student body.
- Learning is a lifelong process. Programs and services will encourage community, students, and staff to continue to pursue learning and training opportunites.
- Commitment to providing equitable treatment of all employees.
- Commitment to individual health and wellness through programs and activities.
- Commitment to philosophy of collaborative decision-making where all faculty, staff, and students have opportunities to participate in shared goverance.
- Commitment to educational excellence and quality. Teaching and learning will remain the centerpiece of the campus mission.
- The establishment of partnerships as means of achieving campus vision. The campus will actively promote partnerships and collaboration with students, community leaders and agencies, businesses and other educational institutions to meet the educational and training needs of our various constitutencies and to fulfill its role as a partner in stimulating economic and social development.

B. SHARED VISION FOR RIVERSIDE CAMPUS

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES: *RIVERSIDE CAMPUS WILL*

- Be a full-service campus and deliver a comprehensive lower division curriculum which meets identified educational and training needs.
- Be recognized locally as the college of choice for lower division postsecondary education and postsecondary occupational training.
- Offer a comprehensive package of academic and student support services to RVS students and expanded services to the immediate geographical community including
  - health services
  - childcare services and child development programs
  - adult (senior citizens) services and programs
  - recreational opportunities
  - summer bridge programs and art/career exploration for youth
  - cultural and continuing education workshops and forums for community
- Provide quality job training programs
  - through establishment of a RVS Voc-Tech/Hi-Tech Center
  - through on-the-job training in partnership with business and industry
  - through experiential learning
  - through constant assessment and modification of programs to ensure relevance
- Serve as a city-wide center for medical/health techology training
- Capitalize upon successful health care programs, services, and staff expertise to become a full partner in providing health care services and continuing educational opportunities to both campus community and surrounding communities.
- Provide effective job placement services for students
- Make RVS campus a cultural and educational center for community
- Promote institutional certificates and the associate degree as significant measures of student accomplishment

DELIVERY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Expand educational offerings through use of flexible hours and flexible delivery modes including interactive instruction, distance learning, contract education, continuing education, independent study, and field work

RESOURCES FOR PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Seek alternative funding sources for expanding identified programs/services
- Establish linkages/partnerships with industry to establish Voc-Tech/Hi-Tech Center
- Establish linkages with community, government, industry, educational institutions (K-12 and local universities) to identify, plan, and implement collaborative educational and training opportunities

FACILITIES

- Expand RVS facilities to meet enrollment demands and educational needs of community
- Develop Voc-Tech/Hi-Tech Center to respond to educational training needs of East/Southeast Austin communities
- Develop Health Science Center to coordinate RVS health-care training and service programs
- Develop Center to house K-12 bridge programs/services on RVS campus
- Ensure that new and existing facilities are adequately maintained and meet clean environmental concerns

Other Proposed Facilities (Consensus not reached)

- Sports/Recreational Complex
- Visual and Performing Arts Center
- Multi-purpose Classroom Building
- Educational/Cultural/Community Campus Hub

C. MAJOR (MUST DO) ACTION STRATEGIES

- Establish partnerships/liaisons with major area employers to determine training needs,directions, and opportunities to share resources
- Establish liaisons with area feeder middle schools, high schools, and local colleges to facilitate student access, student success, and student transfer
- Develop joint grant proposals, funding opportunities and collaborative programs with area colleges and K-12.
- Establish community focus groups to validate Future Search Conference directions and identify additional planning issues
- Involve faculty and students in agressive recruitment efforts for under-represented students at RVS and reestablish minority recruitment office at Riverside Campus
- Seek alternative funding sources to expand programs and support services such as child care and health care.
- Identify and expand flexible course scheduling options and delivery systems
- Provide comprehensive campus staff development opportunities for faculty and staff
- Develop mechanisms to include students and staff in campus decision-making processes
- Implement a college-wide information system for programs and services
- Assess continuously RVS programs and services to ensure relevance and quality
- Develop a proactive, participatory planning and budget allocation process

Northridge Campus
Future Search Conference Summary
"Creating a Quality Community"
March 31-April 1, 1995

Ken Wright, Vice-President of NRG, summarized **seven themes** that emerged at our conference.

1. More learning technology
2. Accessible childcare
3. Expansion of tax base
4. A Technology Center
5. Better faculty/staff morale, especially by reducing the fulltime/part-time ratio
6. Expansion of facilities
7. More service to the community

We all decided that our **common values** were:

--human-centered
--student-centered/student-oriented
--learning
--equity
--service
--excellence/quality
--fearless/explore, adventure
--humor - quest for consensus
--diversity
--trust
--fun
--inclusiveness
--connectedness

We vowed we would strive toward these **common futures**:

--balance in facilities, workload, resources and services
--technology center
--improved communication
--expansion with planned growth
--nexus (the community college as a hub)
--partnerships
--student development/professional development
--childcare, mentoring and support services
--teaching excellence
--diversity and improved delivery systems - ways we learn, teach, etc
--increased resources for funding (alternative and diverse)
--richness of culture
--faculty/staff morale
--involvement/ownership

Besides the action strategies already mentioned, here are some additional action strategies:

--develop a community advisory board, scholarship fund
--conduct a reality check with business and government
--create more public recognition for ACC
--advocate for student representatives on cabinet and board

Ken Wright promised to be held accountable to follow-up this conference.
John Kish promised there would always be paper towels in the bathrooms.

Rio Grande and Eastridge Campuses
Future Search Conference Summary
"Future Search: Renewing, Changing, Growing"
April 7-8, 1995

The conference was a stimulating meeting of a diverse group of people composed of students, faculty, staff and administrators from the campuses and business/community leaders. Although differences of opinions were readily expressed, the conference members worked together to forge a future vision of Rio Grande and Eastridge Campuses. The following is a brief summary of the key themes of the conference.

TRENDS SEEN IN FOCUS ON THE PAST

- People seeking stability; globally, much instability
- More opportunities available for wider variety of people
- Fear of instability has moved from outside to inside US
- Very little is known about ACC

MAJOR THEMES SEEN IN SCENARIOS OF 2005

- Registration/Accessibility
- Recruitment/Retention
- Expanded Student Services
- RGC Campus: Same location
  - Buildings owned by ACC (including gymnasium)
  - ACC purchases neighboring buildings for support needs
  - ACC-owned parking garage
  - Light rail/transit linkages between RGC/East Austin/UT/HTC
- East Austin Campus, with central East Austin location:
  - Vision A) Full-service ACC campus with comprehensive curricula
  - Vision B) Specialized campus with
    - Literacy Training
    - Skills Training/Job Placement
    - Social Services
    - Day care/Parenting Skills Center
    - Gymnasium
    - Cultural Center for community
- High use of technology in classrooms
- Partnerships with Community and Business

COMMON VALUES AGREED UPON BY ALL PARTICIPANTS

- Diversity of students/faculty/staff
- Collaboration/Cooperation/Shared Responsibility among students, faculty, administration, staff, community, business
- Clearly defined roles/responsibilities
- Effective Communication
- Flexibility
- Accessibility
- Student/Faculty/Staff Continuous Learning

COMMON FUTURES AGREED UPON BY ALL PARTICIPANTS

- Expanded hours
- Expanded accessibility of service
- Campus expansion
  - Buy AISD property
  - Outreach to East Austin
- East Austin Facility
- Owned facilities/conducive to learning environment
- Well-defined Board and Administrative Roles
  - Remove barriers
  - Provide support
  - Open communication
- Inclusive programs for all levels of need
- Inclusive college environment
- Increase technology
  - Computers in classroom
  - Teaching, training, communications tools
- Student services
  - Child care
  - Social services
  - Job placement
  - Student lounges with food service
- Technologically equipped facilities
  - Multimedia and Internet
  - Maintain human contact
- Partnerships
  - Financial, business, schools, internships, government agencies
- Community ties
- Transportation
  - Shuttle
  - Parking
  - Intercampus

MUST DO'S DEVELOPED BY ALL GROUPS

- Take an active role in ACC future development
- Actively participate in task forces, professional groups, student organizations, etc.
- Plan departmentally and individually on basis of common futures
- More publicity and more student organization
- Take advantage of scholarships already established (students)
- Recruit for and promote East Austin facility
- Cross-training and inter-office exchanges
- Suggest and vocalize our need for resources
- Make a personal commitment to training and use of technology
- Fundraising
- Outreach to business and alumni
- Lobby against tax abatements
- Proposals for federal grants and funds
- Coordinate East Austin Initiative and Eastridge Campus
- Transportation, parking, bus routes
- State and identify ACC's needs to the community
- Publicize and market current successful partnerships
- Increase Technology
  - Acquire hardware and software for faculty and classroom use
  - Provide incentive to train and use technology
  - Provide orientations and training to faculty
  - Provide funds to attend seminars on new topics
  - Incorporate into 10-year planning
- Increase number of full-time faculty
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) implementation
- Expand day care, student services, job placement
- Provide health center, student lounge/food serv.
- Buy Annex and Gymnasium
- Evaluate current student services and solicit student input
- Identify key individuals in the community who will participate.

OUGHT TO DO'S

- *Students*
  - Mentor programs
  - Take advantage of office hours, computer and tutoring labs
  - More environmentally aware and active
- *Staff*
  - Collaborate on better ways to do things
  - Share knowledge, decrease territorialism
  - Increase accountability
  - Improve interpersonal skills
- *Faculty*
  - Within the given time limits, faculty focused on "MUST DO's "
- *Administration*
  - Increase personal responsibility of faculty and staff to know about exemplary programs
- *Community*
  - Put money into school

COULD DO'S

- *Students*
  - Announce organization activities in class
  - Ask businesses to sponsor activities, internship
- *Staff*
  - Hold openhouse activities
  - Use displays, posters, bulletin boards
  - Attend more professional organization activities
- *Faculty*
  - Within the given time limits. faculty focused on "MUST DOs"
- *Administration*
  - Discuss issues in staff meetings
  - Publicize staff/student accomplishments

Personalize, take more time in transactions

Self-study: decrease antiquated time-consuming activities

- *Community*
  - Establish internships with ACC

District Administrative Offices
Future Search Conference Summary
"FutureLinks"
April 20-21, 1995

There was debate as to whether DAO should have its own conference as did the campuses. But, as we all "gathered by the river" to review our past and to chart the future in terms of how to best serve our students, it was clearly a worthwhile process. Employees and community members worked together and produced the following:

Mind Map: Present Trends (in no particular order)

1. Workforce Development
2. Regional Perspective/Issues
3. Accountability
4. Integration of Technical and Academic Programs/Curriculum
5. Partnerships
6. Funding Issues
7. Diversity of Students, Employees and Communities
8. Special Populations/Special Needs
9. Holistic Perspective
10. Technology
11. Internal Management Training
12. Resources for Students

Common Futures:

- fostering of partnerships--internal and external
- use of improved technology including telecommunications to gain access to facilities, services, information, and instruction and to use as decision-making tools
- maintenance of significant, effective interpersonal contact (Let's be nice to each other!)
- effective appropriations of facilities, services, and staff
- continuous education and training of ACC employees
- expanded marketing efforts: college services and ACC image
- shared vision

Common Values

- trust, compassion, and honesty
- service orientation toward students, employees, and community members
- accessibility: transportation and delivery systems
- quality
- human contact
- continuous individual and organizational improvement
- adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness
- diversity and inclusiveness
- Have fun!

Action Strategies: Must Do

Increase internal and external communications through marketing efforts, public information
Use media for staff development, community involvement, Internet
Seek partnerships and conduct joint planning
Share curriculum and instruction
Develop non-credit transition to credit

Must Do: continued

- Develop curriculum modules
- Stay current in course offerings and respond to labor market needs
- Improve services to students in the areas of registration, fees payment, reporting and tracking
- Access the Internet
- Remove barriers to flexibility in using resources and leverage for funding
- Plan for internal and external use of facilities
- Evaluate work flow processes
- Re-engineer work flow processes
- Automate processes
- Obtain updated equipment
- Assess and respond to customer needs
- Identify needs for and increase staff development with continuous training on-line, self-study, cross-training
- Commit to providing necessary resources in an equitable manner
- Fully implement a student information system and a college-wide information system
- Identify and support partnership initiatives
- Improve partnerships/relationships/communications between instructors and administrators
- Advise on use and design of facilities
- Seek input from instructors on courses schedules
- Research demographics, enrollment trends, emerging technologies/demand occupations
- Study new technologies and potential applications
- Study standardized use of common hardware and software vs "free choice" selections
- Identify indicators of success: how do we know we're there when we get there?
- Share common vision
- Move application processes on-line
- Provide an on-line decision-making model
- Establish more comprehensive advisory committees
- Provide the calendar on-line
- Develop and follow a Master Plan for overall functioning and marketing
- Have fun and enjoy our jobs!

Ought to Do:

- Develop ongoing, accessible and relevant training and provide incentives for participation
- Partner for use of facilities
- Educate and respect internal diversities
- Plan for and manage change
- Emphasize individual commitment to continuous improvement
- Follow through on commitments to instill trust
- Advise on use of telecommunications and technology for instructional use
- Connect commonalities to students through faculty

Austin Community College
Capstone Future Search Conference Summary
May 4-6, 1995

Executive Summary

To discover our common vision and values, ACC conducted the Capstone Future Search Conference on May 4-6 at the Green Pastures Conference Center. We invited ACC students, faculty, staff, and administration, as well as community, business, and government representatives to join in the endeavor. Following is a summary of our common vision and values, potential projects, unresolved issues, campus issues, and seven task forces–outcomes of the conference.

Common Vision and Values

*more customer-oriented
*regional expansion
*alignment of instruction to customers
*partnerships
*diversity/inclusion
*holistic concern for students / community
*communication
*response to change
*telecommunications
*trust
*high tech/high trust
*excellence in teaching learning
*accessibility
*school-to-work
*more external relationships
*adequacy of facilities
*reduction of bureaucracy
*student services
*market-driven
*connectivity
*continuous improvement
*professional development
*funding/tax base
*shared governance
*caring/student focus
*collaboration
*innovative advising
*broaden community base
*equity

Potential Projects

*Foundation initiatives
*workforce needs
*outcomes assessment
*child care
*customer needs
*cross talk
*student mentoring
*active recruitment/retention
*expand articulation
*information kiosk
*expand financial aid
*sharing resources with UT
*involvement of employees on committees
*student-run food services
*intercampus shuttle
*student newspaper/govt.
*women's studies
*learning organization
*professional development units
*alumni association
*internships
*weekend college
*more PR about ACC
*loan computers to students
*service training days

Unresolved / Unique issues
*facilities/parking/classrooms/labs
*professional development
*career ladder
*effective communication
*raise P-T faculty pay
*more F-T faculty
*ongoing dialogue with board/students
*internal quality study at ACC

Unique Campus Issues
*future of SW campus
*Board vision of RGC/Eastridge
*Voc/tech Ctr-East Austin needs
*under-utiliz. of Cypress Creek
*annex Round Rock
*relieve over-utiliz. of NRG
*light-rail: growth RVS/NRG
*multipurpose classroom/ sports complex at RVS
*city-wide center for med/health tech training/Certificate/AS degree/continuing education

Seven Task Forces	**Contact**
1. Communications with Students	Rhonda Hamilton
2. Workplace / Community Partnerships	Cassy Key
3. Alumni Association	Hunter Ellinger
4. Technology / Telecommunications	Ron Brey
5. New Philosophy / Mission Statement	John Worley
6. Leaming Organization	Tobin Quereau
7. East Austin Initiative	Donetta Goodall

Lessons Learned

We continue to learn valuable lessons from the Future Search Conferences even as we move beyond them. The "lessons" listed here are those which have become more immediately evident as we complete the series and which have some broad significance to the process as a whole. The individual conference reports are filled with information, ideas, and insights that are relevent for our institution's present and future, but that information is not the focus of this section. Our purpose here is to document the most important lessons we learned concerning the conference series itself. Our hope is that, in doing so, we can enhance the depth of our own learning and provide useful feedback and guidance to those who are exploring this model themselves.

1. It can be done! In the beginning of the process, we had moments of uncertainty and panic that we had unleashed a dragon which would consume us and the institution itself before we were finished with it. The complexity of initiating six separate conferences within the same organization scheduled to be held over a ten-week period felt overwhelming at times. We were trained, but *not* experienced as future search conference facilitators at that time, so there was much "learning" at every turn for all concerned. Needless to say, we have no lack of experience now, and we would willingly do it again! *The reality of the process was that it was exhilarating and rewarding and, with the help of the steering committees, a very manageable task.*

2. We could not "do it ourselves!" When the ownership of and responsibility for a specific conference was accepted fully by the steering committee, the outcomes were excellent. When, as facilitators, we became caught up in "helping out" or "doing" too much planning ourselves, the results were not as powerful. The future search model draws on the willingness, creativity, and energy of the stakeholders who plan for and attend a conference. When the facilitators become seen as the "experts" and decision-makers instead of the steering committee or the conference participants themselves, the investment of the stakeholders is reduced and the results are less robust and long-lasting. *The power of the future search model comes from the people who become committed to its success. The planning process as much as the conference itself must reflect that perspective if the conference is to bring about maximum benefits.*

3. It is worth doing. The decision to proceed with a series of conferences rather than one for the institution as a whole raised our anxieties from the beginning. We knew from our training that the model worked, but we were not sure that *more* was necessarily going to be *better*. Our fears (and those shared with us by others) were that we could either become swamped with conflicting and disparate visions from the different campuses, or find ourselves needlessly repeating the process several times over with little or no additional benefit or outcomes. The result of the series was that neither fear came to pass.

Each of the campus conferences was valuable in and of itself. As expected, the experience helped to generate cohesion, clarity, and commitment to the unique shared vision for the future of each campus and to initiate actions which lead in that direction. Each phase of the process brought added value and allowed for the campus communities to move forward without having to wait on the "hierarchy" to give its permission. *The Capstone Conference provided the means to affirm, validate, and expand on the campus visions and the shift in focus to the larger context was essential to begin integrating these visions into a meaningful whole.*

4. Each conference has a life of its own. One important factor when considering a series of future search conferences is that each of the conferences must focus on and be hosted by a significant functional unit already in place. It is essential for those who participate to be able to identify their own "stake" in the organization or community sponsoring the conference *and* to feel that what they create as a specific planning community can and will be implemented at that level.

We do not think that conducting several conferences each with the identical focus would have the same effect. The incentive and value in the future search process is that a particular community of people is able to acknowledge their common ties, dialogue about possibilities and preferences for the future, and discover common ground from which to take action. If the results are not immediately evident, open for all to see, *and available for action*, the effort

becomes separated from the outcomes and the potential for transformative change is reduced. Perhaps this is one of the difficulties of running "multi-searches" all at the same time–there is not the same sense of closure within any one conference which can lead to direct action. *Whether in a single application or a series context, we firmly believe that in planning and in practice each future search conference must be unique and reflective of an organizational unit or community of people prepared to act on the results.*

5. Each conference has its own "life cycle". Whether in series or in a single application, each conference is made up of three different phases each of which requires a special set of tools and skills on the part of the facilitators. In the first stage, that of ***preparation,*** the tools may be written materials, video tapes, and sample worksheets. The skills are primarily those of informing, guiding, facilitating and networking with the planning committee. During the second phase, that of ***presentation,*** the tools are round tables, participant guidebooks, flip charts and butcher paper, wall space, pleasant surroundings, and good food. The skills are mainly task management, information management, facilitation of whole group dialogue, and consensus management during the conference. In the third phase, that of ***dissemination,*** the tools are summary and in-depth reports, post-conference presentations and feedback sessions, planning processes, and collaborative teamwork. The skills are those of documentation, clarification, inspiration, follow-through, and outcomes monitoring with the larger organization.

A future search could also be seen as an ongoing cycle of each of these phases with different audiences. The *dissemination* phase after a conference could be considered a *preparation* phase for the next round of visioning within the larger organization. In other words, there is no single beginning or end to the future search process, and no "final" vision or set of values that emerge from it. The more it is seen as an ongoing, living process of attention, interaction, and reflection, the greater the likelihood of "buy-in" and "ownership" by all members of an organization.

In a similar fashion, there is a pattern to the level of involvement of the facilitators. Although the facilitators may be very active in the initial part of each phase, ideally they find ways to move into the background as quickly as possible so that the participants and other members of the organization can assume responsibility for continuing the process. *The highest compliment to future search facilitators is when the participants feel, "We did it ourselves!"*

6. Above all else, get the right people there. The most difficult task of any that we ran into was managing to get the right people into the room for the entire conference. Whether it was developing a sufficient picture of the "whole system" with the planning committee, devising a means of selecting the most representative sample of that system to invite, or finding ways to encourage the key people invited to commit their *undivided time, attention and energy* to the conference, this part of the process had the greatest impact on successful outcomes of any we could discover. An excellent presentation can be limited in its value if the participants are not fully representative of the institution and its community, if they do not experience their own "stake" in the success of the institution, or if they are not able to participate throughout the three days.

It is not the "vision" that is the most important outcome of a future search conference, it is *what people do in response to the vision* that matters. *When you have the "right people" motivating themselves to collaborative action in support of the institution, you have begun the transformation of that institution's present practices and future possibilities. And to do that you must get those people there.*

7. Every "system" needs a center. This concept is difficult to convey concisely, but it was apparent throughout our experience with the future search process. It is perhaps most often expressed in terms of "leadership" in organizational contexts. We felt it more as issues of identity, boundaries, interdependency and initiative, however, in the future search conference setting. It was most evident in the process and outcomes at those times when the "center" was not very evident. When there was a clear "client" (to use Marvin and Sandra's term), one person who took full responsibility for

initiating and supporting the process, the conferences were more successful. This person (or persons) did not have to occupy a formal position of leadership (and often did not!), but was the one or ones who provided the consistency, enthusiasm, and perseverence which carried the group forward.

In similar ways, when the stakeholder groups were clearly identified and represented, the work of the groups went well. When the "stake" was ambiguous or the connection unclear between the group members, there tended to be more hesitancy and reluctance to engage in the exercises and less creativity in the reports to the group. In much the same way as a cell requires a nucleus, the planning committees, the small groups–mixed and stakeholder alike–and the whole group in dialogue worked more effectively when there was a sense of a "center"–a person or persons, a theme or common experience, or a shared vision for the future on which all could agree. It was not that it had to be always present or even clear as long as it was available given sufficient investment of energy and attention. *In fact, it may be the very discovery of that "center" in the midst of diversity that makes the future search process so transformational a process in the life of an institution.*

8. Stay with the program. The future search model has been developed and refined over many years. The variations which have been tried are extensive. The core of the method, however–the five exercises–has remained because it works. While there are comments and complaints at times from planning committee members and from participants, often these are reflections of anxiety about the use of time and the potential outcomes of the process. As much as possible we recommend following the model closely during the first few future searches one conducts.

After holding to the basic structure for five conferences in a row, we did make a substantial change right at the end of the sixth. The context was different than that of the first five conferences, the intent was to illuminate an area of importance to the college, and the result of the change we made was quite profound in its impact. The difficulty we experienced later came because we had to give up on the final planning activity in order to make room for the new exercise. The effect on the final conference as a whole was to leave the

participants without the feeling of completion and forward-focus that were experienced in the other conferences. Since we are heading into strategic planning as our next step, the action-orientation will not be lost entirely, but the need to address that part of the process is very important and we will need to pay special attention to it in some other ways. *Creating a sense of closure is a vitally important part of the process. It is what validates the effort and insight which has been generated throughout the conference and liberates it for transmission to the larger context of the organization and its community.*

9. It's never over until it's over. The future search process is a short-term intervention with long-term effects in the life of an organization. It takes months of preparation on the part of a few people, but in only three days it can generate lasting impact on thousands. Be sure to draw on the outcomes from the conference in as many ways as you can for as long as you can. It is helpful to generate summary reports of a page or two in length as soon as possible following the conference dates. The summary reports are good vehicles for dissemination to a wide audience of institutional members directly, through articles in newsletters, etc., and in orientation materials for new employees. In-depth comprehensive reports should also be prepared and distributed widely to more fully document the range of creative ideas and initiatives which were developed during the conference.

Periodic updates to conference participants--every six months or so--can keep the enthusiasm and motivation to act alive and well. The future search conference itself may become a "legendary" event when enough time has gone by but the attention can then be focused on the projects, changes, and new directions which emerged as a result of the conference. *Eventually the vision that is crafted from the interplay of the conference and the follow-up activities can become the vehicle for continuous creative change in an organization. There is always room for further learning and growth.*

Let us know if this report has been helpful to you and please share your learnings with us. Above all, we wish you good luck and good learning in your search for the future you desire!